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A Woman's Guide To AIDS

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Table Of Contents

PAGE 1
OVERVIEW

PAGE 2
WHAT ARE AIDS AND HIV?

PAGE 4
SEX AND AIDS FOR WOMEN WITH MEN

PAGE 6
SEX AND AIDS FOR WOMEN WITH WOMEN

PAGE 8
DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND AIDS

PAGE 10
HIV TESTING

PAGE 12
PREGNANCY, CHILDREN AND AIDS

PAGE 14
CAREGIVING AND RESOURCES

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Women And AIDS

This booklet was written by women for women. Because AIDS is a part of all of our lives, we all need to know how to stay healthy. While there is no cure for AIDS, we can learn how to protect ourselves from getting it, and stay healthy if we are infected.

Because AIDS is a part of all our lives, we all need to know how to stay healthy.

We've written this to help you decide if you are doing anything that puts you in danger of getting HIV--the virus that causes AIDS. It will also help you find the services you need if you think that you or someone you love is infected, or if you are already taking care of someone with AIDS.

Women's lives are changed by AIDS in three main ways:

- We can get HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and become sick.
- We can pass the virus on to our sex partners, needle-sharing partners, or newborns during pregnancy.
- In caring for others, we may forget to take care of ourselves.

After reading this booklet, you may have questions to ask or you may just want to talk with someone. The New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) AIDS Hotline--212-447-8200--is open seven days a week from 9:00 in the morning until 9:00 at night. The Hotline counselors are trained and caring professionals who have information about medical care, counseling, testing and support. They will answer your questions and listen to your concerns. You do not have to give your name.

We can help people who have HIV or who are sick with AIDS. We have the power to keep ourselves and others from getting AIDS. Consider the safety guidelines presented here and start practicing them in your life.

Let's do it for the love of our lives.

WHAT ARE AIDS AND HIV?

This Booklet Is About AIDS And HIV.

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. AIDS is the name for a disease that weakens the body's ability to protect itself from getting sick. Having AIDS may mean getting very sick or even dying.

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. If HIV gets in your body, you may stay healthy or you could get sick and develop AIDS. HIV is also called the "AIDS virus."

How Does AIDS Affect Women?

- In New York City, AIDS is the leading killer of women between the ages of 25 and 34.
- Women who are infected with HIV (the AIDS virus) can pass the virus on to their sex partners, needle-sharing partners, or newborns during pregnancy.
- Women are taking care of husbands, lovers, children and friends with AIDS.

Women can help each other.
We can teach other people to help themselves.
AIDS is preventable.

How Do We Become Infected?

- Most women become infected with HIV through sharing needles, cookers, or cottons ("works") with someone who is infected.
- Women also become infected if the person they have sex with is infected. Remember *you can't tell if someone is infected by the way he or she looks!*
- Some women who had a blood transfusion or received blood products before March 1985 became infected. *All donated blood is now checked for HIV.*
- A small number of women became infected through artificial insemination because the man donating sperm was not checked for HIV.
- Some babies become infected during pregnancy, birth, and as a result of breastfeeding when their mothers are infected.

AIDS Is Not Spread By:

Donating Blood	Coughing	Sharing:	Touching:	Bug Bites:
	Sneezing	*Glasses*	*Toilets*	*Mosquitoes*
	Kissing	*Dishes*	*Doorknobs*	*Ticks*

This disease can be frightening. But ***you can protect yourself and the people you love by getting information, medical care and support.***
(See "Resources")

Sex And AIDS: Just The Facts

You can protect yourself and the people you love by getting information, medical care and support.

Having Only One Sex Partner Does Not Protect You From AIDS.

Many of us think we are not at risk for getting HIV, the AIDS virus, if we only have one sex partner and our partner is faithful to us. This is not necessarily true. HIV can live in a person's body for ten years or more without him or her knowing it. During these years, the virus can be passed on to other people--*you*--through unprotected sex or sharing needles.

If your partner is infected with HIV, he or she can pass the virus on to you. This can happen even if your partner is no longer using drugs or having sex with anyone else, and looks clean and healthy. This can happen even if your partner doesn't know he or she is infected with HIV.

Withdrawal Does Not Protect You From AIDS.

Withdrawal (when the man takes his penis out before he cums) is *not* good protection from HIV or pregnancy. A clear liquid comes out of a man's penis *before he cums*, which he doesn't even feel. This clear liquid may have HIV in it, which can be passed on to you.

Douching Does Not Protect You From AIDS.

Douching after intercourse does not offer any protection from HIV or pregnancy. In fact, douching pushes the semen (cum) and any virus farther into your body. *So don't douche*, unless your doctor recommends it for another reason.

Birth Control Pills And Diaphragms Do Not Protect You From AIDS.

The pill and the diaphragm do not prevent HIV infection. They can be good birth control methods, but they will not protect you or your partner from becoming infected with HIV.

Learn the facts about AIDS so you can protect yourself, your partners, family and friends. If you have questions or concerns, talk with your partner, a friend, a counselor, or the AIDS Hotline: 212-447-8200.

The more you know, the more choices you can make.

Even with the danger of AIDS, we don't have to stop having sex or having babies. But we do have to protect ourselves and our loved ones. Unprotected sex with an infected partner puts us in danger of getting HIV (the AIDS virus). This is also true if we trade sex for drugs or money. We can prevent infection with HIV by practicing sexual behaviors that do not get semen (cum), vaginal fluids, or blood into our body or our partner's body.

You Can't Tell If Someone Is Infected By The Way He Or She Looks. You or your sex partner may have been infected many years before you got together. A lot of people who have the virus stay healthy and have no symptoms for a long time. They may not even know they are infected. It's important that you talk with your partner about past partners and follow the safety guidelines on the next page.

If it is difficult for you to ask your partner to use condoms and follow safer sex practices--or if you fear physical violence or other results from saying no to sex--get help to decide what to do. Call a hotline or talk to a health provider, counselor, or friend. You are not alone.

Remember: Start Now
Be Positive
Reach Out For Help

The Choice Is Yours

Call The NYCDOH AIDS Hotline: 212-447-8200.

Guidelines For Women Having Sex With Men

You are at risk for HIV infection if you have unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex with an infected man. Both men and women can pass HIV on to their partners through unprotected sex.

The first step toward safer sex is communication .... Practice makes it easier.

The following guidelines are designed to help you stay healthy by protecting yourself and assessing your risks.

Know How To Protect Yourself.

These sexual activities are safest because there is no exchange of vaginal secretions, blood, or semen:

Hugging	Massaging	Masturbating	Body-to-body Rubbing
Kissing	Fantasizing	Cuddling	Using Sex Toys With Condoms

Use Condoms During Vaginal Sex And Anal Sex (sexual intercourse).

- The best protection against HIV is a latex condom (rubber) combined with a spermicide. Spermicides with Nonoxynol-9 kill HIV. Natural or lambskin condoms can let HIV pass through.
- You can use condoms and spermicides together by putting the spermicidal foam or jelly into the tip of the condom, or you can use condoms lubricated with spermicides. Use what's best for you.
- Condoms vary. Experiment until you find a comfortable one--it may increase your partner's willingness to use them. No man is too big or small for a condom. Snug fit condoms are available for smaller men.
- If you need lubrication during sex, use a water-based lubricant like K-Y jelly or diaphragm jelly with Nonoxynol-9. Stay away from oil-based lubricants (like butter, Crisco, or Vaseline). Although these are popular, they may make the condom break.

Use Condoms Or Dental Dams During Oral Sex ("going down").

- When you go down on a man, use unlubricated condoms. By wearing a condom, your partner is preventing his fluids (cum) from getting into your mouth.
- When a man goes down on you, use a dental dam (a thin layer of latex) or plastic (like plastic wrap for food). By covering your vagina you are preventing your fluids from getting into his mouth.

Practice Makes It Easier...

We all have to learn to have sex in a different way--a safer way. The first step toward safer sex is communication. Sex can be fun and erotic, even when using condoms, dental dams, and spermicides.

Talk with your partner, experiment, enjoy, and stay healthy.

Sex And AIDS: For Women Having Sex With Women

Being a lesbian does not exempt us from AIDS. All women are at risk of becoming infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Lesbians *do* get AIDS. The risk of getting AIDS comes from what we *do*, not what we *call* ourselves. Behavior transmits HIV.

So How Do We Protect Ourselves?

Women need to *talk* about two issues before having sex:

1. *Talk* about whether you or your partner are at risk for HIV infection.
2. *Talk* about safer sex techniques and the ones you want to use.

Behaviors That Put Us At Risk Of HIV Infection:

- Using IV drugs and sharing needles and/or works with someone who is infected
- Sharing sex toys with an infected partner without washing and covering them with a condom before each use
- Having unprotected oral sex ("going down" on each other) with an infected partner, especially during your period
- Having unprotected sex--especially for money or for drugs--with women or men who are infected

How Does HIV Get Into Your Body?

- HIV is transmitted by vaginal secretions, blood, and semen entering your body through your mouth, vagina, or anus.
- For lesbians considering pregnancy through artificial insemination, if you do not go through a sperm bank, you and the man donating sperm may want to be tested for HIV.

The choice is ours.
We need to learn to talk about our sex lives, past and present, and to negotiate safer sex.

GUIDELINES FOR WOMEN HAVING SEX WITH WOMEN

Being a lesbian does not exempt us from AIDS ... Behavior transmits HIV.

These guidelines are for lesbians at risk for HIV infection because of unprotected oral, vaginal or anal sex with an infected woman or man. They are intended to help you make educated decisions about sex.

Assess Your Own Risk.

The following sexual activities are safest because there is no exchange of vaginal secretions, blood (especially during your period), or semen:

Hugging
Masturbating
Fantasizing
Kissing
Using sex toys with condoms (rubbers)
Body-to-body rubbing
Massaging

If You Think You Or Your Partner Are At Risk, You Can Protect Yourselves If You:

- Use a dental dam or plastic wrap for oral sex ("going down" on each other), especially during your period.
- Wash and cover sex toys.
- Use latex coverings--finger cots--or latex gloves for hand/vaginal or hand/anal sex (fingering or fisting) if you have cuts on your hands.
- Use condoms with Nonoxynol-9 if you have sex with men.
- Use water-based lubricants like K-Y jelly or diaphragm jelly with Nonoxynol-9 to prevent condom breakages and skin irritations.

Communication is the first step towards safer sex. Practice makes it easier. Talk about these guidelines with your partner, a friend, or a counselor. Also, there are hotlines and other services that you can contact that are knowledgeable and sensitive to lesbian issues and concerns.
(See "Resources")

DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND AIDS

All drugs including heroin, crack, cocaine, alcohol, marijuana, and prescription drugs can put you at risk for AIDS. When you use drugs and alcohol, you may take chances--like having unprotected sex. Also, drugs and alcohol make your body's defenses weak and you may get sick more often. If you are already infected with HIV (the AIDS virus), it's even more important to take care of yourself.

The Danger Of IV Drugs (mainlining or skin-popping heroin, cocaine, speed, morphine, etc.):

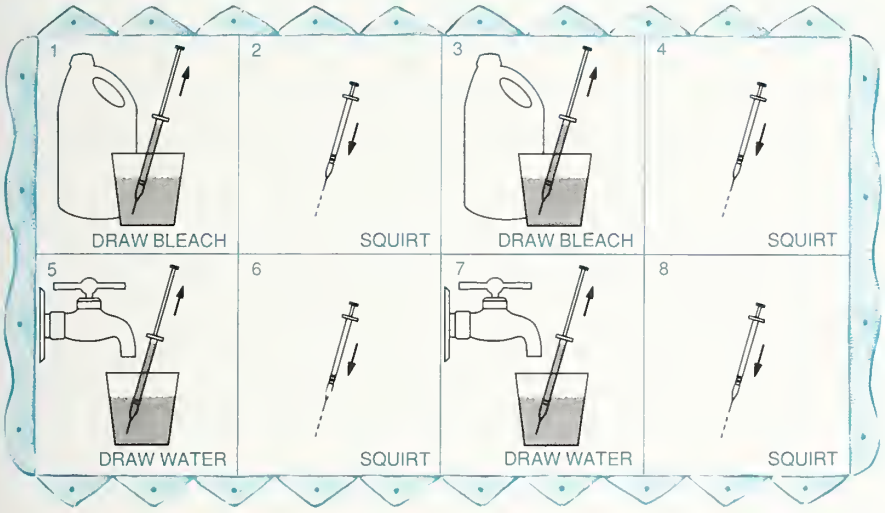
- More than half the IV drug users in New York City are infected with HIV and can pass it on to you. *You can't tell if someone is infected with HIV by the way he or she looks.*
- HIV lives in needles, "works," cottons, and cookers. *So don't share.* Anyone--your brother, a friend, or "running buddy"--could be infected.
- Using IV drugs puts you at risk for getting infected with HIV, the AIDS virus.

You can save your life by getting off drugs. You don't have to do it alone. You can call:
Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)
Cocaine Anonymous (CA)
Narcotics Anonymous (NA)
Association for Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment (ADAPT)

If you aren't ready to stop using drugs, don't share needles and works. If you have to share works, you must clean them first.
It's easy to do.
Just follow the steps on the facing page.

The Danger Of Taking Chances:

- Even if you don't shoot drugs, you are still at risk for AIDS, because drugs can make you take chances. If you take a chance and have unprotected sex, especially in exchange for drugs or money, you can get HIV.



You can't tell if someone is infected with HIV by the way he or she looks.

The Danger Of Partners Who Use Drugs:

- Even if you don't use drugs, you can be infected if your sex partner was a drug user. So use a condom every time you have sex.
- If you're having a tough time dealing with a partner using drugs, call the NYCDOH AIDS Hotline: 212-447-8200. People who know about drugs and alcohol use and AIDS will answer the phone.

The Danger Of Any Drugs:

- It doesn't matter how you do it--shooting, smoking, drinking, sniffing, and snorting all put you at risk for HIV.

You can save your life by getting off drugs.
You don't have to do it alone.

(See "Resources")

HIV Testing

As women, we have many choices to make about our health, our loved ones, and our future. The best way to make choices is to have information or to know where to get it. Being tested for HIV is an important decision. The NYCDOH AIDS Hotline--212-447-8200--is a place where you can find out about testing, counseling and available treatments. (See "Resources")

What Is The HIV Antibody Test?

The HIV Antibody Test (sometimes called the "AIDS test") is a blood test that tells you if you have been infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. *It is not a test for AIDS.* Anyone applying to immigration, the military, the Peace Corps, Job Corps, or donating blood is automatically tested.

How Do You Get Tested? You May Choose:

Anonymous Testing: The NYC Department of Health offers *free* pre- and post-test counseling and testing. Appointments can be made through the NYCDOH AIDS Hotline. You do *not* give your name or address. Only the people you choose to tell will know about your test result.

***Confidential Testing*:** Doctors, clinics, and hospitals can test you for HIV. The HIV test is *not* a part of your regular blood test--you have to ask for it. Make sure you get pre- and post-test counseling and that all your questions are answered before you sign the consent form. Since the test result goes into your medical record, ask how your confidentiality will be protected. Also, check to see what the service will cost you.

If You Test HIV NEGATIVE:

- You are not infected with HIV. *But*--if you don't start to protect yourself now by practicing safer sex and safer drug use, you are at risk of getting infected.
- Talk to a counselor to decide if you need to be retested within six months.

If You Test HIV POSITIVE:

- You are infected with HIV, but we don't know if or when you will get sick. Getting medical care right away could save your life.
- New treatments have been developed that can help keep your body's defenses strong and able to fight off illness. It is not too late to take care of yourself. Talk to a health provider or counselor about medication, diet, lifestyle changes, and pregnancy.
- Practice safer sex and don't share needles. Even if you have no symptoms, you can pass the virus on to someone else.

The New York City Department of Health recommends testing for people at risk. ***The choice is yours.***

If You Are Infected With HIV

The New York City Department of Health recommends testing for people at risk. The choice is yours.

There are many things you can do to help yourself stay healthy and strong, including taking treatments to help build up your body's ability to fight HIV, the AIDS virus, and other infections. *Get medical care.* Call the NYCDOH AIDS Hotline for medical referrals, information and support: 212-447-8200. Don't give up because you test positive.

- Seek counseling to help you think about your different options, and consider joining a support group for people who have tested HIV positive. You don't have to deal with this alone.
- Practice safer sex and safer drug use to avoid getting more virus in your body and to avoid passing the virus on to others.
- Be careful not to catch someone else's cold or infection. Signs of HIV infection include low grade fevers, constant yeast infections, herpes, or persistent dry cough and sore throat. These symptoms may also be caused by other illnesses, like the flu or common cold. If the symptoms continue, consult with your doctor. Early treatment can make a difference.

You Can Help Yourself Stay Healthy If You:

- Get checked regularly by a doctor
- Eat a balanced diet
- Exercise
- Get enough rest every day
- Learn about stress reduction

Who Should I Talk To About My Test Result?

Talk to people you trust and who can give you support and information about the virus, your health, and your choices. Talk to people you might have infected so they can get the services they need. If you're unsure about who to tell, you can call the AIDS Hotline and talk it over with a counselor, *before* you decide. (See "Resources")

As A Person Infected With HIV, You Have The Right To:

- Medical Care
- Confidentiality
- Keep Your Housing
- Not Be Discriminated Against
- Be Treated Well And Fairly

Health care, counseling and support groups are available.

Pregnancy And AIDS

If you are pregnant, or are thinking about having children, it is important to know whether or not you are infected with HIV (the AIDS virus). Pregnant women who are infected with HIV have a 30% to 50% chance of passing the virus on to their babies. Even if you are feeling well, you could be infected with HIV and not know it. Early prenatal care is important so that you can be healthy and have a healthy baby.

You Can Get Infected With HIV If You:

- Share IV needles or works
- Are the sex partner of a man or woman who is infected with HIV
- Received a blood transfusion between 1978 and March 1985
- Were artificially inseminated and the man donating sperm was not checked for HIV

Infants Can Get Infected With HIV:

- During pregnancy, at birth and through infected breast milk

What You Can Do To Protect Yourself And Your Baby:

- Get HIV counseling. Testing will be offered to you and your partner.
- Get early and regular prenatal care. Ask your nurse or doctor about what foods you should eat and how much rest you need.
- Especially during pregnancy, avoid using IV drugs, crack, cocaine, alcohol, and cigarettes--they can harm you and your baby.
- Use a condom when you have sex, even during pregnancy.
- Do not breastfeed if you are infected with HIV.

If You Find Out You Are Infected With HIV:

Think about what being infected with HIV means for you and your baby -- see the next section, Children and AIDS. Only you can decide whether or not to get pregnant. Only you can decide whether or not to have a baby.

This is your choice and your right.

Children And AIDS

Many babies are born infected with HIV (the AIDS virus) and more and more older children are being diagnosed with AIDS. As mothers and women, we can help prevent the spread of HIV among our young and improve the lives of those already infected or sick. We can begin by understanding AIDS and by talking to our children about it.

As mothers and women, we can help prevent the spread of HIV among our young.

How Do Children Become Infected?

Babies can become infected with HIV:

- During pregnancy, at birth and through infected breast milk

Young children and teenagers can become infected with HIV:

- By having sex (voluntarily or forced) with an infected person
- By sharing IV drugs or "works"
- By having received a blood transfusion between 1978 and March 1985

Things To Look For In Children Who Are Infected With HIV:

Children UNDER 13 years of age who are infected with HIV may grow slowly and become sick often. Common infections include:

- Swollen glands (lumps in the neck, armpits, or groin)
- Thrush–thick, white coating in the mouth–that may leave the mouth sore
- Fevers that you can't explain

Children OVER 13 years of age who are infected with HIV may have infections similar to those seen in adults, such as: low grade fevers, persistent dry cough, sore throat.

These symptoms could be caused by illnesses other than AIDS, like the flu or a cold. If you are concerned, take your baby or child to a clinic or doctor. ***Early treatment can make a difference. New medications are available.***

Talking To Our Children:

It's difficult to talk to our children about AIDS because it means talking about sex and drugs. But they have already heard about AIDS, and we can help them stay healthy by helping them understand the facts.

What We Can Do If Our Children Are Infected With HIV:

- Get medical care and join a support group. (See "Resources")
- Use common sense rules of cleanliness, like washing your hands.
- Give your child plenty of love. Don't be afraid of:

Touching	Drooling	Sharing food/plates
Hugging	Sharing toilets	Changing Diapers
Kissing	Coughing, Sneezing	

Women And Caregiving

If a family member or loved one becomes sick with AIDS, you may be the one who cares for him or her. You may feel helpless because you can only care, not cure. You may feel depressed or tired from the amount of time it takes to care for someone who is ill. You may fear rejection by your friends, neighbors, families, or employers if they find out you are caring for someone with AIDS. *You are not alone.* Help is available through support groups, counseling and other services. (See "Resources")

You Don't Have To Worry About Caring For Someone With HIV Or AIDS.

Remember, you can't get infected with HIV from:

- Touching, hugging, kissing
- Changing diapers
- Being coughed or sneezed on
- Sharing food, plates, forks, or toilets

Just follow common sense rules of cleanliness to protect yourself and the person who is sick: wash your hands before eating as well as after cleaning up stool (bowel movement), urine, vomit, or blood.

Caring is all we spread by daily contact with people with AIDS.

While caring for someone with AIDS, don't forget to take care of yourself, too. Try to eat a balanced diet and get plenty of rest. Talk to a friend, family member, counselor, or join a support group. Don't go through it alone.

Remember, As A Caregiver You Have Rights.

- You have a right to *keep your housing.*
- You have a right *not to be discriminated against.*
- You have a right to *be treated well and fairly.*
- You have a right to *confidentiality.*
- Your loved one has a right to *medical care.*
- Your infected child has a right to *attend school.*

If you're caring for someone with AIDS...
Counseling, information, and support groups are available.

You are valuable. You are needed.

AIDS Resources

AIDS Hotlines And Education

(Wide range of information, referrals and services)

NYCDOH AIDS Hotline
(212) 447-8200

Gay Men's Health Crisis Hotline
(212) 807-6655

PWA (People With AIDS) Hotline
(212) 532-0568 and (800) 828-3280

NYCDOH Bureau of HIV Education, Outreach & Community Development
(212) 285-4625

Hispanic AIDS Forum
(212) 966-6336

Information And Referral Services For Women

Women and AIDS Resource Network (WARN)
(718) 596-6007

Health Education AIDS Liaison (HEAL)
(212) 674-4673

Community Health Project
(212) 675-3559

Caribbean Women's Health Association HIV Information
(718) 826-2942

HIV Testing *

NYC DOH AIDS Hotline
(referral for anonymous testing and support groups)
(212) 447-8200

Caregivers

PWA (People with AIDS) Coalition
(212) 532-0290

AIDS Family Service of New York
(212) 807-6655

Women With AIDS

(Help at home, counseling and support groups)

PWA (People with AIDS) Coalition
(212) 532-0290

NYC Human Resources Administration
AIDS Case Management Office
(212) 645-7070

The Momentum Project, Inc.
(212) 268-2610

God's Love We Deliver, Inc.
(meals for homebound PWA's)
(212) 865-6500

The Black Women's Health Project
(718) 596-6009

Women's Network
(212) 333-8788

Lesbian Concerns

NYCDOH Office of Gay & Lesbian Health Concerns
(212) 788-4310

Community Health Project
(212) 675-3559

Gay & Lesbian Switchboard of NY
(212) 777-1800

St Marks Women's Health Collective
(212) 228-7482

Project Connect
(alcohol services)
(212) 620-7310

While caring for someone with AIDS, don't forget to take care of yourself, too.

* *The NYC Department of Health recommends testing for people at risk.*

Alcohol And Drug Use

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)
(212) 683-3900

1-800 Cocaine Referral Service (CA)
(800) 262-2463

Cocaine Anonymous Support Group
(800) 347-8998

Drug Information Hotline
(800) 522-5353

ADAPT (Assoc. for Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment, Inc.)
(212) 289-1957

Medical Services

NYCDOH AIDS Hotline
(referral to treatment services and to clinical drug trials)
(212) 447-8200

Legal Services

NYC Commission on Human Rights
AIDS Discrimination Division
(212) 306-7500

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc.
(212) 995-8585

Gay Men's Health Crisis Legal Resources
(212) 337-3513

Community Service Projects And Task Forces

Minority Task Force on AIDS
(212) 563-8340

Brooklyn AIDS Task Force
(718) 783-0883

AIDS Service Center of Lower Manhattan
(212) 645-0875

Upper Manhattan Task Force on AIDS
(212) 870-3352

Support Services
(212) 870-8958 or 870-8152

South Bronx Human Development Organization AIDS Hotline
(800) 334-3477

AIDS Center of Queens County
(718) 896-2500

This is not an all-inclusive list of resources, and the NYCDOH does not officially endorse any of these organizations.

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